THE NEW STATESMAN AND NATION

The Week-end Review

TWENTY-EIGHTH VOLUME (New Series) JULY 1st to DECEMBER 30th, 1944

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LONDON, 1945: The Statesman and Nation Publishing Company, Limited, 10, Great Turnstile, W.C.1

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Printed in Great Britain for the Proprietors by the Cornwall Press Ltd., Paris Garden, Stamford Street, London, S.E.1., and Published by The Statesman and Nation Publishing Co. Ltd., at 10 Great Turnstile, High Holborn, London, W.C.1.

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AUG 2 1944

THE NEW

STATESMAN AND NATION

The Week-end Review

Vol. XXVIII. No. 698. [Incorporating THE ATHENÆUM] SATURDAY, JULY 8, 1944 [Registered at the G.P.O. as a newspaper] SIXPENCE

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BEFORE THE LEAVES FALL?

Germany is finished. The war will be over the autumn." That, according to report, is hat German prisoners are saying in France. We e sure they are saying it, with even more rtainty, in vast cages of prisoners on the Russian ont. And all of us in England, on all fronts and roughout Europe, are asking whether we dare hope for the end of war in Europe before next nter. Among people who have experienced e strains and disappointments of nearly five ars of war optimism is apt to be dismissed as shful thinking. But wars are normally decided ng before the approach of the end becomes sible: it was only after the publication of erman war histories that it became known how early the leaders of Germany realised in August 918 that the war could not be carried on longer an a few months. To-day we cannot be sure hether the same conviction has penetrated the inds of Hitler and his associates; the Führer s declared that he will fight on till five minutes st twelve, and the leaders of the Nazi regime ve little personally to hope from capitulation. et assuming, as we may do, that the Allies ntinue this summer in unison to use all their sources, moral and material, there seems a real ssibility of the end of hostilities in Europe fore the leaves of autumn are off the trees.

Two factors support this conclusion. First, ere is the degree of material disintegration in e enemy's ranks which the first phase of the ed Army's summer offensive has brought about ith sensational speed. In a single fortnight the entral Group of German Armies, comprising (it s been reported) no fewer than 50 divisions, s been decisively routed and swept out of White ussia with the loss of half its effectives. In the ntre of the Russian advance Minsk has fallen, nd so have Polotsk and Slutsk on the two anks. Unchecked as yet by any serious opposiion from the remnants of Field-Marshal Busch's nce powerful army group, the Russians are weeping on towards the Warsaw-Dvinsk railway nd East Prussia, threatening as they advance to ut off the German armies in the Baltic States. he fate of Busch's army group is not in itself ecisive for the Reich. There are still, it must be remembered, perhaps 100 German divisions south of the Pripet Marshes who have to be engaged and worsted; and in the West the Allied forces have still to convert their initial victory in securing a firm bridgehead into a successful campaign of movement against the 50 or 60 divisions which Field-Marshal von Runstedt holds in France. Allow for all this and for other doubtful factors, and it remains true that the Red Army's victory in White Russia is a terrific portent. What can be done once can be done again. It is clear that the Wehrmacht is no longer a match for the Russian forces on the Eastern front, just as it is clear that Field-Marshal Kesselring is no longer in a position to hold up the Allied advance in Italy, and that once the Allies in the West have mastered the armoured divisions which Rommel, with a gambler's instinct, has staked in the battle for Calvados, the German garrison in France (comprising, as it does, many semi-static divisions of indifferent quality) may crumble quickly.

The second fact which appears to warrant optimism is the marked increase in the proportion of German commanders and soldiers who have been laying down their arms on both Eastern and Western fronts when they considered that honour had been satisfied. An instructive incident was the surrender of a German garrison in Cherbourg while it still had a full stock of arms and equipment and the possibility of long and bloody resistance. It yielded to the persuasion of a loud-speaker van, after well-timed leaflets had done their work.

It would be unwise to infer from such surrenders that morale in the German armies is finally degenerating, or that defeatism has reached such a point that stern resistance is no longer likely. The capitulation of nearly a dozen generals certainly seems significant, and—from another point of view—the lack of ruthlessness displayed by the Germans in face of the very remarkable Danish strike would appear to betoken loss of grip in face of an increasingly menacing movement of resistance throughout the occupied countries. We have seen, however, in Italy how Kesselring's army managed to pull itself together after its apparent disintegration following the battle for Rome, and there is little doubt that, so long as they see no logical alternative, the majority of German soldiers will go on fighting with endurance from one defeat to another. Indeed, if no authority emerges on their side which can conclude an armistice, it is conceivable that they may go on fighting back to the German frontier, and even within the Reich itself, so long as any groups of organised resistance can be sustained.

In these circumstances, if Europe is to be spared the horrors of another winter of war, the task before the leaders of the United Nations is to bring to bear against the German army, not merely the whole weight of their armed forces, but the maximum pressure of political warfare. There are bitter hatreds within the ranks of Germany's leaders; upstart Nazis and old-fashioned Junker generals do not love one another, and there is beneath the surface, ready to break out when the Wehrmacht is defeated, the pent-up resentment of millions of German and foreign workers, now said to be making common cause.

Political warfare must be based on a realistic analysis. Immediately, we are concerned with rulers with whom there can be no question of bargaining. German spokesmen have declared that Germany is willing to abandon the attack on England by robot planes if we give up the strategic bombing of targets in Germany. Obviously, we shall enter into no bargain not to bomb with all our might the oil plants and other military targets of Germany, but our reply, which should be dinned into German ears, is that, if the German armies lay down their arms, the bombing of Germany will cease forthwith. One way or another we must convince the German people, as we have not yet convinced them, that there is a thinkable alternative to going on fighting. Even to-day we might succeed in doing this if we assured them that by surrendering they could save their lives and preserve their cities from further destruction; that the victorious Allies do not propose to put Germany to fire and sword; and that, in due course—we cannot say when—a revolutionised Germany will have a chance again to take its place in the comity of nations.